

LISTENING



AGENDA

- Starter
- Message Relay
- Listen Up!
- Message Relay Revisited
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will recognize that good listening skills are important to their success.

Students will identify ways to improve their listening skills.

Students will practice and evaluate the effectiveness of active listening skills.

Starter (3 minutes)

Begin this lesson by presenting the class with the following riddle:

A man and his son are in a car accident. They are taken to a hospital where the man is kept in the intensive care unit. As his son is wheeled into the operating room, the surgeon walks in and says, "I can't operate on this boy. He's my son!" How can this be?

Tell students that you will discuss the riddle at the end of class, so they have the entire class period to think about it. Say, "You may have heard what I said when I told you the riddle, but good listening means both hearing and understanding. Today we're going to find out what it takes to listen well."

Part I Message Relay (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students recognize that listening involves more than hearing, and that good listening skills are important.

1. Students prepare for the activity.

Divide the class into groups of six. Select one volunteer from each group to join you at the front of the room.

Explain to everyone that you are going to give the volunteers a message. They will then go back to their groups and whisper that message to one other student. That student will whisper it to another student and so on, until everyone in the group has heard the message. Caution students to listen carefully to the message and repeat it exactly the way they heard it.

2. Students hear a message and pass it on to others.

Quietly give the volunteers the following message:

If you see Missy, tell her to pick up the two poodles and the cocker spaniel as she usually does after school. But today, she must also pick up a shepherd named Sam, four terriers all named Joanne, and a Great Dane named Tiny.

Have students return to their groups to pass on the message. Remind them to whisper the message to just one other student in their group.

3. Students evaluate results.

When students have finished, ask the last person in each group to repeat the message for the class. After all students have shared, ask the class how many dogs Missy should pick up after school. (Missy should pick up nine dogs.)

After some debate, read the message again to the class and repeat the question. Invite students to make observations about how successfully the message was communicated. Encourage them to explain why it was difficult to get the details of the message straight.

Conclude the activity by making the observation that there's more to listening well than just hearing. Say, "Active listening requires that you pay attention to what is being said, understand it, and then remember it."

Part II Listen Up! (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students learn how to improve their listening skills.

1. Students recognize the importance of active listening.

Point out that it takes at least two people for communication to happen. One person sends a message and another receives it. Write the following equation on the board: "speaker + listener = communication."

Invite a volunteer to help you demonstrate what happens when one of the elements of the equation is missing. Ask the volunteer to give you directions to someplace nearby (e.g., their home, a restaurant, or a store). As the student is speaking, look around the room, make eye contact with another student, pick up something on your desk, bend over to tie your shoe, and so on. When the volunteer is finished, ask:

- Do you think that I heard what you said? Why or why not?
- Do you think that I understood what you told me? Why or why not?
- If I had to follow your directions, do you think that I could get there?

Erase "listener" from the equation on the board. Then, ask if you should erase the word "communication" as well. Ask students to give reasons for their answers.

2. Students learn ways to improve their listening skills.

Tell students that there are three simple things they can do to become better listeners and improve their communication skills: focus, confirm, and respond. Write each of these three words on the board as you briefly describe them:

- Focus your attention on the speaker. Let the person know that you are listening. How can you do this? (You can do this nonverbally by nodding and making eye contact. You can also show that you are focusing by not doing something else while the person is talking and by not interrupting.)
- Confirm what you are hearing. You can do this by repeating parts of what the person says or by summarizing what's been said. You can also repeat or summarize silently to yourself.
- Respond to the speaker in some way to show that you have heard and understood what has been said. You might ask questions, make comments, or continue the conversation.

Reiterate that being a good listener is an important key to communication. Rewrite and underline your equation on the board.

Part III Message Relay Revisited (15 minutes)

Purpose: In order to use and evaluate the effectiveness of active listening skills, students repeat the opening activity.

1. Students listen to a brief story and pass it on.

Tell students that they are going to repeat the activity they did at the beginning of the class. Challenge them to use active listening skills as they listen to a brief story and pass it on to others.

If necessary, review the procedure described for the activity in Part I. Then, divide the class into groups of six and select one member from each group to join you at the front of the room. Quietly share this information with the students who have joined you at the front of the room:

There are 15 passengers on a bus that is heading downtown. At the first stop, four people get off—two women and one man with a baby. At the next stop, four children get off the bus and two men get on. Everyone rides the rest of the way together.

Have students return to their groups to pass the information on. Remind them to whisper the message to just one other student, who in turn will tell another student, and so on. Encourage students to focus, confirm, and respond in order to actively listen to the message.

2. Students evaluate results.

Ask the last person in each group to repeat the information for everyone to hear. After they have finished, challenge the class to answer these questions:

- Where was the bus going? (Downtown)
- How many passengers were on the bus in the beginning? (15) At the end? (9)
- Do you think you did better at relaying information this time? Why or why not?
- When you were telling the story, did listeners pay better attention to you? Explain.
- When you were telling the story, did anyone confirm information or respond to what you said? If so, how?
- Was it easier to remember details this time?

3. Students revisit the riddle from the beginning of class.

Ask volunteers to repeat the riddle you presented at the beginning of class. If necessary, reread the riddle from the starter. Encourage students to offer solutions. (The answer to the riddle is that the surgeon is the boy's mother.)

Make the observation that the riddle is difficult because it plays on a stereotype. Ask if anyone can identify the stereotype. (All surgeons are men.) Point out that the stereotype is further emphasized by the use of only masculine nouns and pronouns in the riddle, which can cause us to assume that the surgeon is a man, too. Say, "In addition to listening carefully, it's also important to think about what you hear!"

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to explain the benefits of having good listening skills. Encourage students to work on their listening skills for the rest of the day to see if it helps them communicate better. Ask students to explain whether they think it will be easy or difficult to develop good listening skills. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Being an active listener is a key to good communication.
- To listen actively, focus your attention on the speaker, confirm what you hear, and respond to what is said.

Student Assessment

1. What is the difference between listening and hearing?
2. List three benefits of being a good listener and three consequences of not being a good listener.
3. List three things you can do to become an active listener.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“Two great talkers will not travel far together.”

Have students draw cartoons to illustrate the truth of this proverb.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students count off into groups of three. All ones are “sculptures,” twos are “artists,” and threes are “clay.” Have the “sculptures” strike a pose. The “artists” should describe the pose to their “clay,” who must duplicate the pose. The artists can’t look at the clay until the activity is over. The clay may ask the artist questions but may not look at the sculptures. Demonstrate the role of the artist before beginning.

Discuss what worked, what didn’t, and why.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write about a personal experience in which communication went awry due to poor listening.

Have volunteers share their experiences, omitting identifying details. Brainstorm ways to improve communication in these situations.

Using Technology

Show students the famous Abbott and Costello sketch “Who’s On First?”

Have students describe how Abbott and Costello show poor listening skills in this sketch.

Homework

Have students bring in a news article, poem, or other short selection.

Have students read the selection to a partner, who will summarize it by giving important details.

Additional Resources

Have a doctor, veterinarian, or salesperson (or anyone else with a job in which communication is key) visit the class and explain how active listening is essential to their work.

Conclude by helping students summarize what they've heard and develop follow-up questions.